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Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 February 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Religious Freedom in India and Pakistan

Situation in India

The growing influence of Hindu nationalists in India is leading to a targeted marginalization of Christians and Muslims and to a general climate of intimidation and violence against other faiths. India's democracy is at a crossroads. If Prime Minister Narendra Modi fails to take action against the Hindu extremists, India's reputation as a nation of law is at stake. More and more often, churches or mosques are burned down – and people of other faiths are forced to convert to Hinduism. Christians and Muslims in India are not only demanding better protection, but also clear words and actions of the Prime Minister to ensure religious freedom in Asia's largest democracy.

In the beginning of February 2015, Hindu nationalists had gotten worldwide attention for announcing plans to forcibly marry couples who show themselves in public on Valentine's Day. The absurd suggestion was made by the party Akhil Bharatiya Hindu Mahasabha. They received a lot of attention, but mostly mockery and criticism. On social media platforms, there were enthusiastic comments from homosexuals – as well as jokes about a possibility to avoid elaborate wedding ceremonies and dowries. Nonetheless, the political party is extremely dangerous because it propagates hate speech. Previously, the party had gained attention by calling Muslims and Christians "infidels", by labeling scantily clad Bollywood-actresses as "prostitutes" and by stating to want to build a monument for the killer of India's founder Mahatma Gandhi.

Because the government prefers to remain silent, the Hindu nationalist movements Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) – which are close to Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) – feel encouraged in their attempts to exclude other faiths and to practice forced conversions. In December 2014, RSS-members had forced 57 Muslim families to convert to Hinduism. Throughout the country, members of other religions feel under pressure to convert to Hinduism – and there are attacks on churches and mosques. Since January 2014, there were at least 149 attacks against Christians in India. In more than half of the cases, the Christians were threatened, intimidated or forced to convert. About a quarter of these incidents were physical attacks against Christian institutions or people of Christian faith. Muslims were falsely accused of trying to force Hindu women to convert to Islam in a campaign called "Love Jihad". The nationalists demanded that 100 Muslims should be converted to Hinduism for every single Hindu who is forced to convert to Islam.

Situation in Pakistan

In Pakistan, the situation of the non-Sunni religious communities is catastrophic. De facto, the minority groups are severely restricted in their constitutionally guaranteed right to freedom of religion."

The blasphemy laws are turning the lives of the Christians, Ahmadiyya Muslims and Hindus in Pakistan to hell – and they are an invitation to kill people. As a member of the UN Human Rights Council, Pakistan is not allowed to promote the exclusion of religious minorities. The principle of religious freedom must be respected! If Christian faith is treated as a crime and if the Muslim state treats members of other religious communities as criminals, the international community shouldn't look the other way any longer."

In the town of Kot Radha Kishan, an angry mob had killed the Christian couple Shama and Shezhad and burned their bodies on Tuesday. The pregnant woman and her husband were suspected of having dishonored the Quran. Since 1990, at least 54 people have already been killed in Pakistan on suspicion of blasphemy. About 1,400 blasphemy-trials were initiated since the introduction of the controversial criminal law in 1986.

While there was only one blasphemy-trial in 2001, the number rose to 80 in 2011 – and 27 cases were registered for 2012. In 2013, 34 people were charged with blasphemy in Pakistan. The cases often end up with long prison sentences or even the death penalty. However, none of the death sentences has yet been enforced. On November 8, 2010, the Catholic Asia Bibi was the first woman in Pakistan in Pakistan's history to be sentenced to death for blasphemy. On October 16, 2014, the High Court of Lahore confirmed the death sentence against the mother of five.

Since the beginning of 2013, Sunni extremists murdered more than 400 Shiite Hazara. Ahmadiyya Muslims have to fear for their lives if they try to practice their faith – while Hindus are excluded from society and often become victims of the conflicts between India and Pakistan

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to call on the government of India to:
- Ensure the freedom of religion
- Ensure the security of members of religious minorities
- Bring to trial the perpetrators of religious violence

Society for Threatened Peoples calls on the Human Rights Council to call on the government of Pakistan to:
- Ensure the freedom of religion
- Ensure the security of members of religious minorities
- Abolish the controversial blasphemy laws. This would be a clear sign to all extremists, that the Pakistani government is serious about protecting the religious minorities.
- Bring to trial the perpetrators of religious violence